

account of a girl who's going to laugh at your funeral."

He threw himself hopelessly into a big English chair and sighed exuberantly, while Gretchen gave him a reproachful look over her mother's shoulder.

"My poor boy, don't give her up," said Mrs. Janney genuinely. "All will come right in time, I'm sure. You must be sweeter to him, Gretchen—you really must!"

"I suppose I must," said Gretchen with an air of resignation. "I'll not be any more cruel than I can help."

WHEN the mother left the room they looked at each other for a moment, and then burst into shameless laughter.

"Poor Mother! She never had a sense of humor. I wouldn't laugh at your funeral, though, Cort. That was unkind. You know I'm afraid Father is very much provoked."

Bent's laughter died, and he gazed at the ash of his cigarette. "He's really quite serious about it, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes. It's an awful nuisance, because in his way he has a will as strong as mine."

Bent smiled. "I'm glad I'm not in his boots. You're fearfully stubborn, Gretchen."

"Because I insist on marrying whom I choose?"

"Because you insist on not marrying me."

Miss Janney sank in a chair by the table, fingering the pages of a magazine. She said nothing in reply; but in a few moments spoke carelessly.

"Tell me something about Lawrence Berkely, will you?"

"Larry? You've met only him once. Your curiosity is indecent."

"You know he's coming here with the Wrays."

"Not really! That's going a bit strong. I don't think I'll stand for that."

"Oh, yes, you will. He's quite as good as we are. He belongs to the Berkelys of Virginia. Mrs. Rumsen knows them."

"That's convincing. Anyone Aunt Caroline knows will need no card to Saint Peter. Oh, Larry's all right; but I warn you not to fall in love with him."

"That's precisely what I've done," she asserted.

He glanced at her amusedly; but she met his look coolly.

"It's true, Cort. He's actually the only man I've met since I came out who really isn't eligible. I'm so delighted! Of course father would never have permitted it, if he'd only known that Mr. Berkely wasn't rich. He hasn't much use for poor people. Oh, he's well enough off, I suppose, as Mr. Wray's partner; but then he doesn't own any of that fabulous gold mine."

"How do you know all these things?"

"He told me. Besides, he's terribly good looking, and has something the matter with his lungs."

"Well, of all the—"

"That's why he's been living in the West. But he's quite well now. Isn't it splendid? I only hope he'll like me. Don't you think he has wonderful eyes?"

"I'm sure I never noticed. See here, Gretchen, you're talking rot! I'm going to tell your father."

"Oh, I don't care," airily; "but if you do I'll tell Mr. Wray."

"Wray?"

"Yes—that you're in love with his wife."

MISS JANNEY exploded this bombshell casually as she removed her hat—watching him carefully meanwhile in the mirror. If she had planned her coup she could not have been more fully rewarded; for Cortland started up, clutching at the chair arms, his face aghast; but when his eyes met hers in the mirror he sank back again, laughing uneasily.

"What—who on earth put that silly idea into your head?"

"You—yourself. I watched you at the Warringtons'."

"What nonsense! I've known Camilla a long time."

"Not so long as you've known me. And you never looked at me like that." She laid her hat beside her crop on the table, then turned quickly and put her hand over his on the chair arm. "You may trust me, Cortland dear. If I'm going to be your sister, I may as well begin at once. It's true, isn't it?"

He remained silent a long while, his gaze fixed on the open fire before him. Then at last he turned his hand over so that his fingers clasped hers. "Yes," he whispered, "it's true, Gretchen—it's true!"

"I'm so sorry, Cort!" she murmured. "I suspected from your letters. I wish I might have helped you. I feel somehow that I am to blame—that we ever got engaged. Won't you tell me how it happened that she married him, instead of you?"

"No—no!" he said, rising and walking to the window. "She—she married Wray because—because she loved him, that's all. I wasn't the man."

Gretchen watched him wistfully, still standing beside the chair he had vacated, full of the first deep sympathy she had ever known. Slowly she walked over and put her hand timidly on his shoulder.

"You'll forgive me, won't you, Cort? I shouldn't have spoken if I had known how deeply you felt." She turned aside with a bitter little laugh. "Isn't it queer that life should be so full of complications? Everybody expects you and me to marry each other,—at least everybody but ourselves,—and we won't, because—Why is it that we won't? Chiefly because everybody expects us to, and because it's so easy. I'm sure, if there was any reason why we shouldn't marry, I'd love you quite madly. Instead of that you're in love with a married woman, and I—I'm interested in a youth with sad, romantic eyes and an impaired breathing apparatus."

"Gretchen, don't be silly," he said, smiling in spite of himself.

"I'm really serious—you'll see!" She stopped and

clutched Bent's arm. "Tell me, Cort! He's not married already, is he?"

"You silly child! Not that I know of. Berkely is a conscientious sort of bird—he wouldn't have let you make love to him—"

"I didn't," with dignity. "We talked about the weather mostly."

"That must have been romantic."

"Cort, I'll not speak to you again!" She rushed past him to the window, her head erect. Outside was the whirr of an arriving motor. "How tiresome! Here come the Billy Havilands," she said. "And they'll want to be playing auction at once; they always do. As if there was nothing but bridge in the world!" She sniffed. "I wish we were going to be fewer in number,—just you and I and—"

"And Larry?"

"Yes—and Mrs. Wray," she put in viciously.

CURTIS JANNEY was already in the big hall to welcome the arrivals.

"Billy—Dorothy—welcome! Of course you had to bring your buzz wagon. I suppose I'll be driven to build a garage some day; but it will be well down by the East Lodge. Do you expect to follow in that thing? Rita! Awfully glad. Your hunter came over last night. He looks fit as a fiddle. Aren't you cold? Gretchen dear, ring for tea."

Noiseless maids and men servants appeared, appropriated wraps and hand baggage, and departed.

"We timed it nicely," said Haviland, looking at his watch, "forty-seven from the ferry. We passed your wagons a moment ago. Gretchen, who's the red haired girl with the Rumsens?"

"Et tu, Brute! That's Mrs. Wray. None of us has a chance when she's around. Here they are now."

The two station wagons drew up at the terrace, and the guests dismounted, Mr. and Mrs. Rumsen with the Wrays in the station wagon, and Baroness Charny, the Warringtons, Jack Perot, and Lawrence Berkely in the bus.

"Well, Worthy got here, after all. Caroline, Mrs. Wray, would you like to go right up, or will you wait for tea? Wray, there's something stronger just inside. Show him, won't you, Billy?"

Wray entered the big hall with renewed appreciation of the utility of wealth. The houses in New York that he had seen were of course built upon a more moderate scale. He had still to discover that men of wealth were learning to make their week-ends out of town longer, and that the real home life of many of them had been transferred to the country, where broad acres and limitless means enabled them to gratify their tastes in developing great estates which would hand down their names in the architectural history of the country when their city houses should be overwhelmed and lost in the march of commerce.

Curtis Janney, for all his great responsibilities, was an open air man, and he took a real delight in his great Tudor house and stables. The wide entrance hall that so impressed Jeff was designed in the ripe Palladian manner that distinguished the later work of the great Inigo Jones. This lofty room was the keynote of the building,—a double cube in shape, the staircase led from the center opposite the door, ornate in a character purely classic, the doorways to the other rooms on the same floor masterful in structural arrangement and elegant in their grace and simplicity. It almost seemed as though the room had been designed as a framework for the two wonderful Vandykes placed at each side of the stairway.

Jeff smiled as he walked into the smoking room, the smile of possession. He realized as never before that taste, elegance, style, were things that could be bought with money as one would buy stock or a piece of real estate. The only difference between Curtis Janney and himself was that his host had an ancestor or two, while Jeff had none.

Miss Janney had quietly and cleverly appropriated Lawrence Berkely, and was already on her way to the conservatory. Jack Perot, who painted the portraits of fashionable women, had taken the Baroness to the Long Room, where the English pictures were hung. Camilla, after a few polite comments on the dignity of the house, sat a little aside in silence. Cortland Bent, after a glance toward the door through which Miss Janney had vanished, dropped into the vacant chair beside her.

"I'm so glad to see you!" she said genuinely. "You know the magnificence is rather bewildering." She paused and lowered her voice. "It seems as if I hadn't seen you for ages."

"Yes," he murmured. "I'm expecting wings any day now. I'm almost too good to be true."

"You're an angel," she smiled. "I want you to be good, and I'm sure I want you to be true. And yet," she paused, "this seems the only case in the world where to be true is to be bad."

"You can't make the sun stop shining."

"I don't think I want it to stop shining altogether. You see I'm selfish. I want it under a cloud, that's all."

There was a pause, significant to them both.

"I am trying, Camilla. I am doing my best. You appreciate that."

"Yes; but it shouldn't be so hard. I don't think it would be hard for me in your place."

His eyes questioned.

"Miss Janney—she is adorable." She looked over the rim of her cup at him as she finished her tea. "My dear Cort," she laughed as she handed it to him, "the best I can say for you is that you have the worst taste in the world. I'm really in love with her myself. I can't see what you could have been thinking of—"

"Any more that I can see what you were thinking of."

There was a refuge from the danger toward which she felt herself drifting, and she took it, addressing her nearest neighbor.

"Mrs. Cheyne, don't you think men have abominable taste?"

"Oh, yes, abominable," laughed the other. "Ugh! I hate mustaches too, don't you?"

Camilla turned a shade rosier; but her discomfiture was lost in the laughter of those who remembered that Cheyne had worn a beard.

"You know I didn't mean just that," explained Camilla. "I meant their appreciation of women, their sense of the esthetic—"

"Anesthetic, Mrs. Wray. That's the only word for a man's perceptions. A French frock, a smart hat, a little deft color, and the plainest of us is a match for the gayest Lothario. They're only bipeds, instincts on legs—"

"Oh, I say now, Rita!" laughed Bent.

"We can't stand for that, Mrs. Cheyne," put in their host. "I suppose you'd think me ungallant if I asked you what kind of instincts women were."

"Instincts with wings," she purred, "angels by intuition, rhapsodists by occupation, and sirens by inheritance. We're not in the least afraid of you, Mr. Janney."

"I should think not! For my part, if I knew that one of you was camping on my trail, I'd give in at once."

"I'm so glad! It's a pet theory of mine that when a woman really sets her cap for a man he had better give up at once; for she will win him, fortune favoring, in the end. Don't you agree, Mrs. Wray?"

"I've never thought about it, Mrs. Cheyne," said Camilla slowly. "By fortune, you mean propinquity?"

"Oh, yes—and other things," laughingly. "For instance, if I had fallen in love with a man, I shouldn't stop to consider. If he was another woman's husband,—say your husband, Mrs. Wray,—that would only add a new element of interest. The more difficult an undertaking, the greater satisfaction in the achievement."

Camilla looked at her steadily for a moment. "I've never thought that any man ought to be dignified by such extraordinary effort. A husband so easily won away is not worth keeping."

The two women had met only once before. They both smiled, sweetly tolerant, their weapons politely sheathed. Only Cortland Bent, who knew the hearts of both, sensed the difference between them.

"You're very flattering, Rita," he broke in, "especially to the bipeds. You've carefully deprived us of every attribute but legs. But we still have those—and can run."

"But you don't," laughed Mrs. Cheyne. "That's just the point. You like the game, all of you. Even your legs aren't proof against flattery."

"Stop, Rita!" put in Betty Haviland. "You're letting out all the secrets of the craft."

"Come, Camilla," said Cortland, rising, "wouldn't you like to see the horses and dogs? It's not nearly dark yet."

"Oh, yes," she cried gladly, and then to her host, "What am I to expect, Mr. Janney, silver feed troughs and sterilized water?"

"Oh, no," said their host, "not yet; but they're worth it."

THE pair made their way through the library and a small corridor that led to the south portico.

"How do you like my cousin Rita?" Bent asked when they were alone outside.

"Is she your cousin?"

"Through my mother, one of the Davidges. Quite wonderful, eh?"

"I don't like her. You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

"Not in the least. She's not your sort, Camilla; but, then, nobody ever takes Rita seriously. She doesn't want them to. She's a spoiled darling. Everybody pets her. That bored kind of cleverness is effective; but everybody knows she doesn't mean half she says."

"I'd be sorry to think she meant anything she said," severely.

Bent laughed. "I'm afraid you're too sincere for my crowd, Camilla."

"Who is Mr. Cheyne?" she asked suddenly.

"A perfectly amiable person with a bald head and a passion for domesticity and music, both of which Rita affects to despise."

"Why did she marry him, then?"

"Nobody knows. It was one of the marriages that aren't made in Heaven, that's all."

"Few marriages are; but they're none the less binding because of that."

"Yes, I know," he said soberly.

She recognized the minor note, and turned the subject quickly. "What a heavenly spot! These are the stables, of course. And the buildings beyond?"

"The kennels. Mr. Janney has his own pack—corking dogs. They've been breeding this strain a long while in England. I suppose they're as good as any in the world."

"I'm wild to see them!"

The head groom met them at the door of the carriage house and showed them through. The much despised touring car of the Havilands occupied a negligible part of the great floor. The coach, brake, carryall, station wagons, victoria, runabouts, and breakcarts, all in royal blue with primrose running gear, looked down with old fashioned dignity and disapprobation on this product of a new civilization. The paneled walls of the room were covered with sporting prints, and the trophy room with its cabinets of cups and ribbons bore eloquent testimony to Curtis Janney's success at horse shows in every large city of the country. In the stables Camilla